



ATFE

Association for

Theological Field Education

2011 ATFE Biennium

**LUCKY MARISA:
A FICTIONAL CASE**

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Lucky Marisa

A fictional case by Sarah B. Drummond

December 8, 2010

Marisa, age 28, is an Associate Pastor for Children and Families at a large, historic church in a New England city. Her church, Second Parish, is known nationally as a flagship in Marisa's Protestant Christian denomination. She felt lucky to have found an opportunity not just in a church of Second Parish's stature but in a fun place to live. As a single woman in ministry, she was hoping to make new friends outside the church and to have "a life."

The position into which Marisa was called was the amalgamation of two different ministry staff positions. In the recent past, Second Parish had had one senior minister and two associate pastors. One associate worked with children and families, and the other worked with youth. The associate who worked with youth also started an outreach program to students at a small liberal arts college whose campus abutted the Second Parish property. According to the senior minister, three was never a magic number. The two associates had never seemed to get along well with each other, even after staff transitions. The senior minister said that turf issues prevented a team dynamic. The chair of the church board simply reported that the church could no longer afford two full-time associates.

Marisa was given responsibility in her first year in the role to work with the religious education committee and the pastor in defining a new role. Leaders in the church realized, they said, that there was no way one person could fill two pastor's roles. Yet they wanted Marisa to have the freedom, they said, to decide what programs to continue to lead, what programs to sunset, and how to work with lay leaders to cover the needs of the programs that didn't require Marisa's direct oversight.

In the midst of this discernment process, Marisa was approached by the lay leader responsible for the youth programs at the Catholic church right around the corner. That church had a thriving program for teenagers called "Reach High." The lay leader, Michael (age 32), gave a compelling description of Reach High to Marisa that had her on the verge of tears. Michael told stories about how the youth had rallied around one of their own when a teen's parent had died, about high schoolers creating their own bullying prevention program, and about one girl in the church who found herself pregnant and utterly supported by her Reach High friends.

Michael had a bold idea: He had just learned of a national grant program on youth initiatives. The grantor focused on programs that promoted youth leadership and community building. He had spoken with the grant officer about Reach High and gotten an enthusiastic response as well as some good advice. One such suggestion from the grant officer was to bring together partners locally for joint applications. If they were to pool their energies, said Michael, the grant could pay for a staff member to oversee a joint youth group between the two churches. A light bulb went on for Marisa. Could a joint initiative help her to get direct youth programming out of the portfolio for the newly-merged associate

pastor position at Second Church? She ran the idea by the religious education committee, and they said, “Go for it!”

Marisa talked about this opportunity, with excitement that mirrored Michael’s, in the next church staff meeting. The Senior Minister, Adam, seemed bemused by her enthusiasm, surprised to hear about the religious education committee’s green light, and otherwise not terribly concerned about moving forward with a grant application. Marisa and Michael met again, and the two of them together approached a third church in the area. They learned that the third church had only three or four youth members, but they secured agreement that they could include the church’s name in their joint grant proposal.

Over the coming months, Michael and Marisa worked hard on the proposal. Since Marisa knew few people in the city at that point, and Michael had lived there his whole life, Michael began to invite Marisa to social events and gatherings. Through Michael, Marisa met several other interesting people around her own age and found herself suddenly busy with friends and activities. Michael and Marisa’s friendship blossomed, and the day they finished their grant proposal they drank champagne to celebrate their accomplishment.

Just a few weeks later, Michael and Marisa were together at an art exhibit when Michael got the call: the grant was theirs! They’d been awarded funding for 4 years of programming at \$40,000 per year, and a commitment to matching funds for two years after that if the churches involved could come up with sustaining funds. They were over the moon! Marisa left the exhibit to race back to the church and share the good news.

When she burst into Adam’s office to share her joy, the response she got was raised eyebrows. He just so happened to be meeting at that moment with the chair of the church board, and they were talking about an unrelated budgetary matter. Adam’s first words were, “Sounds like we’ve found a way to cover your salary.” The chair of the church board retorted, somewhat in jest, “We’re not going to pay her to work for Catholics.” Marisa’s face froze, and she excused herself saying that she would send the proposal to them (again!) to read so they could understand the grant better. Adam thanked her for her visit and signaled that he and the church council president had to get back to their more-important work.

Discussion Questions

What key concepts related to grant-based funding do Adam and the church council president NOT understand?

What was the origin of the miscommunication between Marisa and the other senior leaders in the church?

How should Marisa bring this reaction back to Michael, and how might they strategize together?

How might Marisa work with the religious education committee as she plots out next steps?